(a) whether it is a fact that teenager of Jammu and Kashmir, who strayed into Pakistan a couple of years ago and has recently been released by the Pak authorities has brought letters from a number of Indian prisoners in Pak jails;

(b) if so, the number and the main contents thereof; and

(c) the action taken by government to secure the release of Indians in Pak jails particularly those categorized as Security Prisoners by Pakistan?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) As per available information, a boy Ranjit Kumar, who was released by the Pakistan autorities on 30 August 2003, had brought letters from 9 Indians detained in Pakistani jails addressed to their family members requesting them to plead their cases for early release.

(c) Government, through diplomatic channels, have consistently taken up the issue of early release and repatriation of Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails.

Durable partnership with Syria

1773. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH:
PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India have agreed for durable partnership with Syria;

(b) if so, in which areas the economic opportunities with Syria would be exploited;

(c) to what extent the trade between the two countries would generate;

(d) whether any agreement has also been signed in field of hydrogen fuel; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (c) During Prime Minister's State visit to Syria on November 14-16 2003, the two sides agreed to

strengthen their bilateral relations. Both sides had comprehensive exchange of views on a wide range of important bilateral, regional and international issues, in a way that reflects the deep historical relations between India and Syria. They expressed their satisfaction at the steady and comprehensive growth in bilateral relations. They, however, emphasized that enormous potential for further bilateral cooperation needed to be tapped for mutual benefit. They committed themselves to further strengthening and expanding their bilateral cooperation, especially in political, economic, commercial, cultural and science & technology sectors.

The two sides identified fields such as Biotechnology, Information Technology, hydrocarbons, Railways, Education and Agriculture where existing complementarities could be exploited for mutual benefit. They agreed to encourage the private and public sectors to expand the scope of mutual trade and investments.

In the presence of the President Dr. Bashar Al-Assad and Prime Minister Shri Vajpayee, nine bilateral documents were signed in diverse areas such as culture, information technology, agriculture, technical cooperation, education, literature, small scale industries, biotechnology and science & technology. The two sides hoped that these documents would further enhance the bilateral legal and institutional frame work and boost their cooperation in respective sectors.

Both sides agreed to hold periodic consultations between the two governments on topical issues. Both sides also agreed to increase the frequency of bilateral visits by Ministers and officials and to consolidate the ties between business communities of the two countries. People-to-people relations will also be encouraged, in order to increse and deepen understanding between the societies.

In view of the potential for cooperation in the Hydrocarbon sector, both sides decided to set up a Joint Hydrocarbon Committee,having three representatives from each side. This Committee will be mandated to suggest specific projects for joint cooperation in the Hydrocarbon sector within a specified timeframe. The two sides agreed to consider setting up an Institute of Petroleum with the assistance of the Government of India.

Both sides reviewed their economic and commercial cooperation and identified fields such as Biotechnology, Information Technology, hydrocarbons, Railways, Education and Agriculture where existing complementarities could be exploited for mutual benefit. They agreed to excourage the private and public sectors to expand the scope of mutual trade and investments.

Primie Minister of India also announced a Credit Line of US$ 25 million (US Dollar twenty five million) for development of bilateral trade. The announcement of credit line by India for the purpose of boosting bilateral trade was welcomed by Syria. Both sides agreed to double the bilateral trade by 2005 and decided to identify priority areas for this purpose.

Both the governments noted with satisfaction the progress achieved in bilateral cooperation in biotechnology sector. The establishment of Syrian National Biotechology Centre at the University of Damascus with Indian assistance will further enhance their peaceful cooperation in this vital field. Both sides will undertake joint projects for mutual benefit. Indian Prime Minister announced a special grant of US$ 1 million to assit implemented of the agreed programme of cooperation and make the Centre an institute of excellence.

(d) No.

(e) Does not arise.

Ag eement with UAE

†1774. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the ecnomic, political and commercial agreements made between India the UAE during the State visit of President of India to that country;

(b) whether any agreement on matters of extradition treaty and information technology has also been signed between the two countries; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.